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NEWSLETTER

for members of the Carolina Bird Club, Inc., ornithological society of the Carolinas

Volume 43

January/February 1997

Number 1

Springtime in the Upstate

Bob Maxwell reports on preparations for the spring meeting

Welcome to Clemson for the spring 1997 Carolina Bird Club meeting April 25-27. Work on field trips and the recruiting of leaders is well underway. Planned trips include Clemson, Townville, Table Rock State Park, Beaverdam Creek Waterfowl Management Area, Sassafras Mountain and Rich Mountain. We are hoping for butterflies at the Clemson Botanical Gardens.

Our headquarters for the meeting will be the Ramada Inn on US 123 in Clemson. The room rate for 1-4 persons is \$44.00 plus 9% tax per night. For reservations call the Ramada Inn at (864) 654-7501 or use the reservation form in this newsletter. Be sure to mention CBC to insure the special rate.

The Saturday evening program will be presented by Dr. Sid Gauthreaux a CBC member who is well known among the membership. Sid will be coming to us from the field site on the Texas Gulf coast where he and his wife Carroll are continuing their research into bird migration sponsored by the Department of Defense. He will show us how this research using NEXRAD is leading to the detection of hazardous concentrations of birds for pilots.

Carolina Birders on Line

by Will Cook

As many of you who are familiar with e-mail know, groups such as Birdchat can be a great resource for birding knowledge. Recently, many regions of the country have formed their own mailing lists specializing in birds and birding in their specific region. Louisiana, Texas, Colorado, Oregon Washington state and the Delmarva peninsula are just a few of the regions with their own list. But not the Carolinas--until now.

On December 6, 1996, I was browsing Duke's web page and decided to check to see whether Duke has an e-mail list server, such as ListServ or Majordomo, available. Sure enough, I found that they have Majordomo installed. They even have a form on their web page for requesting new lists. So, on a whim, I filled out the form requesting a new mailing list called Carolinabirds as a forum for birders in the Carolinas. A week later, after I had almost forgotten about it, I received word that Carolinabirds had been set up. I announced the new group on Birdchat and started getting the first Carolinabirders on December 13.

It's easy to join--send a message to majordomo@acpub.duke.edu with no subject and with the message text "subscribe carolinabirds" (without the quotes). You will receive an automated confirmation containing instructions for posting messages and getting off the list, e-mail addresses of CBC officers, and instructions for signing on to other bird groups. If you have trouble getting on the list or have other questions, e-mail me at cwcook@acpub.duke.edu.

The purpose of the list is to foster communication among birders in the Carolinas, providing a place where you can find out about and report rare birds, ask questions about bird ID, get Carolina Bird Club news, make observations on bird behavior and much more. The main rules are that subjects must relate to wild birds in the Carolinas and that posters must tell us who and where they are. Topics such as cats, politics, general conservation issues and other marginally related topics that tend to dominate Birdchat at times are not welcome here; even though they may be important. There are numerous other newsgroups and mailing lists where they would be more appropriate.

After one week of operation we had 69 members. After one month we're up to about 100. We have had some good topics so far, including daily updates on rarities, Christmas Bird Count results and a mystery sparrow in Durham that even has Mike Tove stumped! I hope you all enjoy it.

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Sometimes it's what you *don't* see in the backyard that counts, and until recently I had not seen a case of tick paralysis in my yard birds in three years.

December 1993 I found a dead female House Finch on my front porch. On her head was an engorged tick. A few days later, a live male House Finch was also on the porch (apparently a warm spot). He had two ticks above one eye. I contacted a number of wildlife representatives, who referred me to specialists in Georgia. A researcher there said it was the first report of tick paralysis from my area in several years.

The researcher said it was possible to save the birds by removing the ticks, unless the bird was too far gone. I removed the tick from the male finch, but the bird died the next morning. After I mailed the tick to the researcher, she sent back a report confirming tick paralysis. Several more birds (juncos, cardinals) showed up with ticks over the next several months, but then I saw no more of them — that is, until this past November. Imagine my dismay, after all this time, when I spotted a female House Finch with a tick on her head! So far, I've only seen this one case this go-round.

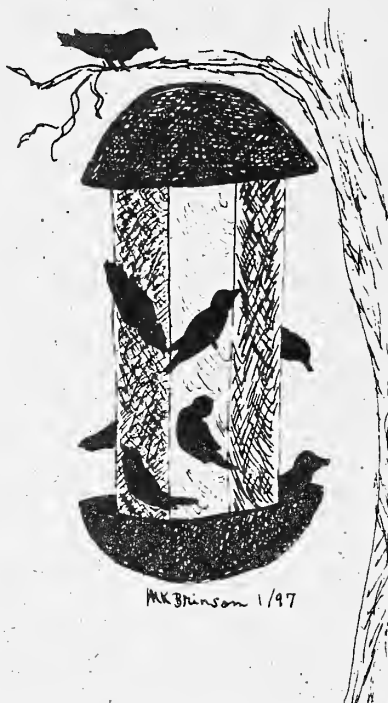
In late November I received a very nice note from Mark E. Johns, Cary, NC, who is NC Coordinator for Partners in Flight. Mark verified that the owls I heard in October were no doubt Barred Owls. He said the owls were giving their call notes as they were beginning to set up territory areas for spring. They are calling as they feed/patrol, or individual owls might be looking for prospective mates or rivals. Mark enjoys the owls' nightly "talks" all through October and November — the time of year they are most vocal except for spring — from his yard in Cary.

November 16 was sunny but very cold, with a fine crop of White-throated Sparrows, one American Robin, and one Red-tailed Hawk.

December 6 Bob came in from walking Scooter, our chocolate Labrador Retriever, and said there was something in the yard I needed to see. There, high in a swinging platform feeder and eating sunflower seeds, was a fat 'possum, who wouldn't be shooed. Every night for the next week, he climbed up and settled in, just swaying and eating.

Backyard Birding

with Martha K. Brinson



December 7 out in the cold, driving rain, I was picking up pine cones for holiday decorations when I heard something above me in the pines. I looked up to see two Brown-headed Nuthatches, who followed me wherever I went with their cheerful little twitter-squeaking. The bird numbers picked up a bit today after weeks of some of the slimmest bird pickin's in some time. Carolina Wrens busied themselves with hopping around in the woodpile, and a Brown Thrasher flicked large chunks of my homemade suet to the ground. A Red-bellied Woodpecker pair ate suet all morning then sunflower seeds all afternoon.

Christmas Eve, after several days of 17-degree weather, was almost balmy. I filled feeders and replenished suet, then sat awhile on the wooden bench under the pines. A White-throated Sparrow hopped onto a low branch of the plum tree while two Brown-headed Nuthatches inched down the Russian elm towards the cedar feeder. Chickadees and Tufted Titmice zoomed back and forth from the redbud tree to the long tube feeder, and two downies grabbed sunflower seeds from the

log cabin hopper. It was pleasantly quiet except for the mesmeric sound of a dozen birds tapping and cracking open the seeds. A Carolina Wren poised on a thin branch, aiming for the feeder named Tweetie's Diner. It hesitated, leaning forward then back, like a little kid mustering nerve to go off the high-dive.

Feeder placement makes for interesting experiments. Birds will completely ignore a feeder in one spot, then swarm it when it is moved two feet away. Strategic placement of feeders can create good traffic patterns. By having feeders completely encircle the yard, I get nice, long zoomings past the windows. And by placing feeders some distance away from each other, but still in the same line of vision, I get to watch the birds fly straight towards me, which offers an exciting view of the swooping, dipping, and landing.

December 26 at 2:00 p.m. a male Purple Finch — the first I'd seen in a long time — landed on the Orient Pear tree. He perched in one spot for 15 minutes, looking bewildered as he surveyed his surroundings. Shortly afterwards, what appeared to be three Fox Sparrows landed on the Jasmine vine, but they were gone before I could grab the binoculars.

December 29 I watched a Tufted Titmouse cling valiantly to an upside-down thistle feeder and take a seed. He did not return for another. I guess it's like a pistachio or crab leg. Tastes great, but it's a tiny thrill for the trouble.

January 4 Herman Lankford, Raleigh, NC, had a Golden-Crowned Kinglet, and a few days before he had a flock of 50 or more Cedar Waxwings clamoring for space on the cedar trees.

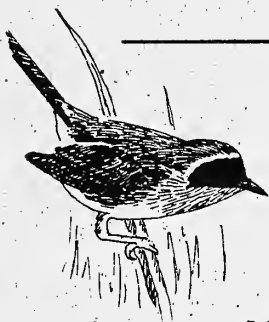
Haven't heard recently from the western parts of SC and NC but would like to. I look forward to hearing from more of you about the birds in *your* backyard.

— Martha (1/8/97)
4300 Green Level Road
Apex, NC 27502

More Backyard Birding . . .

(The following letter did not reach Martha for inclusion in her column. Editor)

December 24 Charles H. Jewson, Southern Pines, NC, says that "a big
(continued on next page)



Chip Notes

Sanctuary Clean-Up Day

Carolina Bird Club members are invited to tour the CBC sanctuary property in Tryon, NC, on **Saturday, February 15**. We will also spend a couple of hours cleaning up the property. This 82 acre tract has been basically undisturbed for the past 30 years. It supports a diverse habitat of riverine thickets, meadows, a stream and dense woodlands.

We will meet at 10:00 a.m. at the Bi-Lo's parking lot on Exit 36 of I-26 towards Tryon. Bring your work gloves and clippers or pruning shears. The clean-up should only take an hour or so and we'll spend some time clearing out a trail and doing some birding. Simon Thompson, FENCE Nature Director, will lead us on a tour of the property. Bring a picnic lunch.

For additional information contact **John Huggins** (704) 877-3843, Fax (704) 883-4358, e-mail Woodbridge@citcom.net.

A Reminder

The *Carolina Bird Club Membership Directory* recently mailed to all CBC members contains the following statement on the back side of the front cover: "This directory is for the personal use of members of the Carolina Bird Club. Reproduction or re-use of this directory for solicitation or any other commercial purpose is prohibited." This is a policy adopted by the CBC executive committee and is the only reason many members allowed their names to be published. It is up to CBC members to prevent their copies of the *Directory* being used for mailing lists or commercial solicitations.

They should also resist the temptation to use addresses of fellow members for their own personal business ventures. A complaint about such use has already been received by the headquarters secretary.

The executive committee has on rare occasions allowed other organizations to use our mailing list where such mailings were considered appropriate. However, application for executive committee approval should always be obtained prior to use.

While none of the Carolina Bird Club publications accept advertising, the *CBC Newsletter* has a fairly liberal policy of carrying announcements of tours, availability of lodging and products of general interest to CBC members. Such announcements should be sent to the editor by the published deadlines.

FENCE Ventures

FENCE (Foothill Equestrian Nature Center) is in the process of completing its 1997 Ventures program. This program, under the leadership of FENCE Nature Director and CBC member, Simon R. B. Thompson, has both domestic and international trips of interest to birders. In addition to day and weekend trips in both Carolinas, longer trips are planned to the Rio Grande Valley in Texas, March 21-29, Mt. Rogers Virginia, May 16-18; Michigan for the Kirtland's Warbler, June 1-7, England, May 26-June 9, Scotland, June 11-24 and Costa Rica in November.

For more information contact Simon Thompson, Nature Director, FENCE, 500 Hunting Country Road, Tryon, NC 28782, (704) 859-9021.

Piping Plover Info Needed

Joshua Long, a senior at Lees-McRae College in Banner Elk, is doing his senior research project on the Piping Plover. He has requested any information that might be helpful in this project. His e-mail address is joshua.long@internetMCI.com or you can reach him at P.O. Box 3459 LMC, Banner Elk, NC 28604, tel. (704) 898-8632.

Birder's Guide to Georgia

The Georgia Ornithological Society has recently released the 5th edition of *Birder's Guide to Georgia*. The 222 page compilation of information on when and where to see birds in Georgia was edited by Joel R. Hitt and Kenneth Turner Blackshaw. Giff Beaton did the bar charts, which are new to this edition, depicting frequency of occurrence, per physiographic region, per month of year for each species. The volume is spiral bound, a welcome feature when trying to drive with one hand and follow directions with the other.

Writing in the *GOSHAWK*, editor Hite states: "there is something else special about our state's *Birder's Guide*. It is, like none other I have seen, an anthology of regional birders' notes, on the roads, the paths, and the places they have found to be the best birding spots, and who want to make this information available to others."

Copies may be ordered from the Georgia Ornithological Society, P.O. Box 1684, Cartersville, GA 30120, at a cost of \$12.00 postpaid.

Backyard Birding (continued)

Yellow-Shafted Flicker landed on the solidly frozen bird bath and I imagine it said to itself 'It looks like water, let's try it' and gave a series of rapid jabs. 'Well, what can be the problem? Try again' jab, baj, jab. He then gave up and drank from the goldfish pool right below.

"The last few days have seen a heavy return to the feeders of all the regulars. . . And for the scraps on the ground below the feeders the other set of regulars. . . Then there is the daily spread of leftover popcorn which at first attracted the crows but now the other ground feeders join in."

Mr. Jewson appreciates all his birds, although some are a nuisance because they kick the seeds out of his feeder—he even appreciates the visiting squirrels!

CBC Rare Bird Alert

(704) 332-BIRD

Mystery Bird Puzzles Birders

by Clyde Smith

As Rob Gluck, Chapel Hill, NC, says "everyone loves a mystery (bird)." It all started innocently enough. Will Cook, Durham, NC, posted a note on Carolinabirds (see article on front page) stating that "the highlight bird of the (Chapel Hill) count was the 'mystery sparrow' that's been coming to Roger Kohn's feeder for the last two winters. This bird has totally stumped everybody who's seen it so far." He also included Mike Tove's description of the bird which had been posted to birdchat.

Size and general shape of a Fox Sparrow. Likely an adult male (it's been coming for 2 years now and the colors are VIVID).

Ground color of the entire bird: upperparts and underparts rich cinnamon-brown, roughly the color of that of a male Orchard Oriole. Head, face, throat black with densely packed vertical streaks of black chevrons extending from the black "hood" onto the chest and upper belly in a "U" pattern, i.e., most extensive in the mid-belly region, and not along the flanks. The center of the back is unmarked but the scapulars and wing coverts adjacent to the scapulars of the folded wing have broad, black vertical streaks. The bill is horn gray and the feet are flesh. Behavior-wise the bird does NOT act like a Fox Sparrow and appears to have some Towhee in it. The iris is brown, but distinctly lighter than that of a White-throated Sparrow (by direct comparison). There is NO white on the bird anywhere. Plumage-wise (ONLY), the color pattern is closest to a Chestnut Mannikin - and almost that bright (that's a comparison, NOT an identification).

Mike knew of no species which it could be. The first responses were directed toward exotic species: Red Siskin, Chestnut Weaver and Grey Bunting. Will Cook discounted these suggestions and added the following to the description:

It's a sparrow-type bill. The bird also acts like a sparrow. I don't know about this bird being "towhee-like" except that it is a large sparrow, like a towhee, and has rich brown and black colors, like a towhee.

Enter Roger Kohn and his wife, Ramona Conyers, the caretakers of the mystery bird. They graciously posted an invitation on Carolinabirds for birders to join them on New Year's Day morning for coffee and a look at the mystery bird. I arrived at their home off NC 751 in Durham at 9:30 a.m. and joined Kent Fiala, also from Raleigh, in watching the large shelf feeded on Kohn's back deck. Roger and Ramona had seen the bird at 7:30 a.m. before we arrived, but it hadn't been seen since. I got acquainted with their dog, Homer, and scanned a nice variety of back yard birds for anything unusual. More birders began to gather until around 20 were present including Will Cook, Liz Pullman and Derb Carter. Around 11:00 a.m. I joined Roger, Homer, a restless two-year-old birder and her mother on a walk to the wetland at the end of their street. Liz also left to return home. We hadn't walked a block when Ramona rushed out of the house waving her arms at Liz's retreating car. THE BIRD had been seen--not on the feeder, but in a bush in the yard. Trotting back to the house I found the bush-empty. For the next half hour I walked from window to window scanning the back yard. By 11:45 a.m. I had to leave in order to get back to Raleigh in time to watch the Gator Bowl (my blood runs Carolina blue). No sooner had I gotten out of sight than the bird put in another appearance. I always knew I was a bird jinx.

The consensus of those who saw the bird on January 1 was that it was a White-throated Sparrow. Will commented "We saw the mystery bird in close proximity to a White-throated and noted that shape, size, and bare parts were almost identical. This bird may appear to be slightly larger than it actually is because it's all-dark." This prompted Mike Tove to summarize

his thinking that the bird was not a vagrant species; was an adult male, the size and shape of a North American sparrow, most closely that of a Fox Sparrow; and not a hybrid. He commented further: "Except for COLORS, the pattern of a dark solid head grading into coarse chest streaking is typical of the Western form of Fox Sparrow whereas the warm colors are associated with the Eastern form. Western Fox Sparrows have a horn-gray bill; eastern have yellow." He rejected the suggestion that it was a White-throated Sparrow because when he saw it in the feeder it was distinctly bigger than nearby White-throats and "the shape was not quite right." He concluded that "the bird is likely a melanomorphic Fox Sparrow from who knows where, but possibly western."

I ran into Roger and Ramona at Jordan Lake on January 4 where we all saw the Snow Bunting at Crosswinds Marina, and Roger questioned the Fox Sparrow id because none of the other Fox Sparrows which frequent his back yard have ever come to his feeder.

There the matter rested until the photos taken by Norm Budnitz were posted on the New Hope Audubon web page by Patrick Coin. Coin commented: "Incidentally, I vote for a melanistic or otherwise aberrant eastern towhee. The bill, head shape, tail length, and long robust legs (?metatarsals?) all say towhee to me. If you take a normal female towhee and color all the white brown, I think you'll get something like the color scheme of the bird. Juvenile towhees are a bit streaky, so maybe that is where the bird gets its streakiness."

There was quick agreement. Franchesca Perez: "I agree with the towhee choice. Look at the size of its head. Towhees have HUGE heads. I banded them this summer, and their heads were always getting caught in the mist nets!" Greg Dodge: "Looks like towhee to me--handled a few in the past--on all points mentioned by P. Coin, as well as tail shape." Evelyn Dabbs, Sumter Co.,

(continued on next page)

Mystery Bird (continued)

SC: "The silhouette, to me certainly appears to be that of a towhee's and the added indication of a silvery bill convinces me." Liz Pullman, Durham, NC: "Nice little towhee."

However, Will Cook cautioned: "Not so fast! As far as I know, few to none of the 20+ people who have seen this bird in real life thought it was an E. Towhee. . . The mystery sparrow is significantly smaller than an E. Towhee, about the

same size as or slightly larger than a White-throated Sparrow. . . One interesting behavior hasn't been mentioned before: the mystery sparrow 'behaved very aggressively toward White-throated Sparrows that came to the feeder'." Roger Kohn adds: "This bird is tough to size, it's hard to compare mystery bird with white-throats directly since he runs them off rather promptly. And we've never seen him in conjunction with a fox sparrow. . . This bird puffs up a lot. . . Mystery bird has a distinct brown

iris which shows up well against his black head. The white-throated seems to have a similar eye but it doesn't stand out as well." Mike Tove: "The bird is NOT a towhee. Period." He believes it is a Fox Sparrow.

What is it? It's a mystery. To view the photos access the New Hope Audubon web site <http://www.rtpnet.org/~nhas/bird/myst/index.html> or the site set up by Lois Schultz which has photos of White-throats and towhees for comparison <http://www.lib.duke.edu/bes/mystery/>.

Membership Application and Order Form

Name _____ Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Tel.. () _____ () _____

(home)

(business)

Enter/Renew Membership As Indicated

Send Materials Indicated

Individual (\$15)	Affiliate Club (\$20)	CBC Cloth arm patch \$1.50 ea., \$1.25 ea. in quantity
Family (\$20)	Contributing (\$35)	CBC Decals (vinyl stick-on) \$2.00 ea., \$1.75 ea. in quantity
Student (\$10)	Patron (\$50)	Checklists 10/\$1.75, 25/\$4.25, 50/\$8.25, 75/\$12, 100/\$15
Library/Institution (\$15)	Life (\$250)	

Make check payable to Carolina Bird Club, Inc. and mail to PO Box 2955, Raleigh, NC 27626-0555

Ramada Inn Reservation Form

Carolina Bird Club
Spring Meeting, April 25-27, 1997

Name _____ Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Telephone No. () _____

(Rooms are \$44.00 plus 9% tax for up to 4 persons)

Please reserve _____ room(s) for _____ persons. My check for the first night's lodging plus 9% tax is enclosed. I will arrive _____ and depart _____.

Mail with deposit to Reservation Dept., Ramada Inn, PO Box 1706, Clemson, SC 29633 or call 1-864-654-7501

Registration Form CBC Spring Meeting, April 25-27, 1997

Name(s) _____

(list each name for name tags)

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Enclosed is my check in the amount of \$ _____ for _____ member registrations at \$6 each, _____ nonmember registrations at \$7 each. Registration at the meeting is \$10 for members and \$11 for nonmembers.

Mail with check payable to Carolina Bird Club, Inc., PO Box 29555, Raleigh, NC 27626-0555

Welcome New Members

Michael & Janet Adams
Charlotte, NC

Jim & Marianne Clark
Lumberton, NC

Alma Lee Davis
Swan Quarter, NC

Mrs. W. L. Harrington, Jr.
Camden, SC

Tom Henson
Greenville, NC

Bill & Karen Johnson
Raleigh, NC

Roy & Betty Lindholm
Chapel Hill, NC

Tom Lorenzin
Davidson, NC

Edward Mills
Wingate, NC

Anita Myers
New Bern NC

Midge & Charlie Ogletree
Columbia, NC

Fred & Louise Robinson
Greenville, SC

Jerry & Christina Robinson
Rocky Mount, NC

Dennis & Sarah Ross
Winston-Salem, NC

Jerry & Patty Shrum
Spartanburg, SC

Sarah Stevens
Winston-Salem, NC

US Fish & Wildlife Service
Charleston, SC

Jo White
Hendersonville, NC

Life Members

John Daughtry
Greenville, NC

Len & Esther Pardue
Durham, NC

**Nongame Wildlife Program
Manager, NC Wildlife Resources
Commission**
Northside, NC

Deceased

Mrs. W. B. Knox
Statesville, NC

Carolina Newhall
Hilton Head, SC

CBC Newsletter is published bimonthly by Carolina Bird Club, Inc., the ornithological society of the Carolinas, with headquarters at Raleigh, NC. CBC is a nonprofit corporation, founded in 1937, with membership open to anyone interested in birds, natural history and conservation. Members are encouraged to submit items of interest to CBC Newsletter, Clyde Smith, Editor, 2615 Wells Avenue, Raleigh, NC 27608, (919) 781-2637 (voice or fax), e-mail, Smith82534@aol.com. Submission deadline is the 10th of January, March, May, July, September and November. Articles may be in the form of typed, hard copy or 3 1/2 " computer disk.

Carolina Bird Club, Inc.



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